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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 001809

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STATE FOR WHA AA/S SHAPIRO
ALSO FOR WHA/AND, WHA/EPSC, EB/ESC, INL/LP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2016
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PREL](#) [KSAF](#) [TRGY](#) [ENRG](#) [TSPL](#) [ASEC](#) [KNNP](#) [VE](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: COBALT-60 STORY FROM THE LIMA END

REF: A. CARACAS 1234
[1](#)B. CARACAS 1233

Classified By: Ambassador J. Curtis Struble; Reason 1.4 (B,D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: On May 8, NAS Director and DepEconCouns met with Alfonso Paredes, manager of Caddin, operator of Rapiscan's GaRDS system in Peru. Paredes described an accidental transfer, by a Caddin engineer (supposedly trained by Rapiscan), of the Cobalt-60 capsule from its storage canister to a non-shielded part of the GaRDS vehicle; it remains a mystery why a trained engineer would do such an unsafe act. At Post's urging, Caddin notified the GOP's nuclear regulatory agency IPEN. Emboff spoke with IPEN investigator on May 9; IPEN is just beginning its investigation and has not asked for USG assistance. The number of Peruvians exposed to radiation is not known but may be a small number. No U.S. personnel were exposed or involved in operation of the GaRDS here. End Summary.

IMPROPER CAPSULE REMOVAL

[12.](#) (C) On May 8, NAS Director, DepEconCouns and NAS Police Advisor met with Alfonso Paredes, owner/manager of Caddin Security Firm in Lima. Paredes said that Caddin imported the Gamma Ray Detection Device (GaRDS) as a demonstrator model from, and under contract with Rapiscan. Caddin had permits for import, operation and export, Paredes said, from the GOP's regulator, the Institute for Nuclear Energy (IPEN). (Note: NAS Lima leased the GaRDS system, with Caddin operators, for road interdiction operations between May and December 2005. We understand that the GOP leased the system prior to NAS. End Note.) Caddin operated the GaRDS system in Peru and subsequently exported the system to Venezuela. Paredes confirmed that his electrical engineer, Ricardo Depuy (certified by Rapiscan) mistakenly removed the GaRDS system Cobalt-60 (Co-60) radioactive capsule from its lead storage canister at the Caddin warehouse in the Chorillos section of Lima. The engineer put the capsule in the GaRDS vehicle as part of preparation for shipping, reportedly (and inexplicably) thinking that at that time it belonged in the vehicle. Paredes said he had had no knowledge of an issue with whereabouts of the Co-60 capsule until receiving a call from Rapiscan on May 6.

13. (C) Paredes told us at the time of our 3 p.m. meeting that he had not notified IPEN, nor any other GOP agency, of the unshielded Co-60 and the possible exposure of personnel. He said he learned of the improper removal only on Saturday, May 6, after speaking with Rapsican's engineer Cesar Rodriguez. Rodriguez told Paredes that the Co-60 capsule may have been in the vehicle. Paredes said that this was not possible, as the lead storage/shipping canister with enclosed Co-60 capsule was in the Caddin warehouse, awaiting shipment. Paredes took digital photographs (which he showed to Emboffs) of the canister and emailed them to Rapsican. Rodriguez then noticed in the photographs the small cylindrical hole in the center of the canister where the capsule is inserted or removed, missing the cover. Paredes then confirmed to Rapsican headquarters in California that the capsule was indeed missing from the canister.

14. (C) Repeatedly pressed for details, Paredes would not tell us even approximate dates for when the Co-60 capsule was removed from the lead canister, nor when he drove the vehicle to the port. (Emboffs noted documents relating to the situation on his desk, but Paredes was unwilling to give us copies.) Paredes said that he wanted to get the facts right before giving out partial information. He said he was working on a prepared chronology with attached supporting documents that he would try to get to us on May 9. Paredes was visibly anxious; he expressed concern about his company that he had operated for over 20 years. He expressed increasing concern about his health in the course of our meeting; he still had not sought medical consultation.

15. (C) Paredes said that after his initial telephone conversations with Rapsican engineer Cesar Rodriguez on May 6, Rapsican has not returned Paredes' phone calls. Rodriguez did not indicate to Paredes if Rapsican would send personnel to Lima to investigate. Post has so far not attempted to contact Rapsican.

THE NAGGING QUESTION

16. (C) Emboffs never received a straight answer as to how a trained engineer could remove a radioactive capsule from its shielding and put it into an unshielded box. Caddin employs two engineers and a technician for work with the GaRDS system. Although trained as an engineer, Paredes said that he was the firm's administrator and was not knowledgeable about the details of handling the system. Paredes showed us what appeared to be original certifications by Rapsican for nuclear device training, and certification by IPEN for nuclear handling for the two Caddin engineers, Norki Faraciolo and Ricardo Depuy.

17. (C) Paredes did not want us to talk to the engineer at the time of our meeting. Paredes also had not yet informed his staff that they might have been exposed to radiation, as he was worried about unduly alarming them. Paredes was not certain to what extent Depuy was wearing protective clothing when he removed the capsule. Neither Paredes nor his staff were wearing protective clothing when they transported the vehicle to the port. Paredes would not speculate as to how much time his staff had spent near the vehicle between the capsule removal and its delivery to the port, but said he would investigate.

HUMAN EXPOSURE - PERUVIANS BUT NO NAS

18. (C) No NAS personnel were exposed to the unshielded Co-60 capsule during this series of events. Paredes said that Caddin personnel, exclusively, handled the GaRDS system, its preparation for shipping and its subsequent transport to the port. Paredes noted that he personally drove the GaRDS vehicle to the port for loading on to the ship. Paredes said that he had no idea of the number of people who were involved in loading and shipping the vehicle.

19. (SBU) Emboffs stressed to Paredes the importance of seeking medical advice for him and his staff. We also emphasized that reporting the incident would be an important

first step in identifying port, ship and other workers who may have been exposed. When Emboff spoke with Paredes on the evening of May 8, he was on his way to a medical clinic.

FORMAL NOTICE MADE TO GOP

¶10. (C) Emboffs emphasized to Paredes the importance of this incident on many levels. We urged him to inform the GOP, and said that we would do that if he did not. Paredes agreed to call the head or deputy of IPEN while we were present, but could not reach either of them. During the evening of May 8, DepEconCouns confirmed with both Paredes and IPEN official Renan Ramirez that IPEN received electronic notification of a nuclear accident. Post received a copy of the notification, which reported only that there had been an incident that Caddin had learned of on May 8. Ramirez told DepEconCouns agreed on May 9 that based on his preliminary telephone conversation with Paredes that morning, there did not appear to be significant radiation exposures in Peru. He said that he was still in the initial stage of his investigation, with a plan to meet with Paredes in the afternoon of May 9. Ramirez did not ask for USG assistance, and the subject of USG involvement in GaRDS did not come up.

NO NAS INVOLVEMENT IN INCIDENT

¶11. (SBU) NAS Lima was not involved in the importation of the GaRDS system into Peru. Caddin had already imported the system when it approached NAS to seek a contract for customs use. NAS contracted with Caddin for Caddin to operate GARDS; NAS personnel were never involved in its operation. At all times a Caddin driver, technical assistant and computer screen operator were in charge of the scanner in the vehicle; it was a "turnkey" operation. NAS was not involved in obtaining Caddin's authorizations from IPEN and other GOP agencies for transport and export of the GARDS to Venezuela.

¶12. (SBU) NAS has been in the process of contracting with Rapiscan/Caddin for use of two more GARDS systems at Peruvian ports. In view of this incident, NAS is reevaluating this plan. NAS is also doing a background check on the two Caddin engineers that have been involved in handling the Co-60 Capsule.

ACTION REQUEST

¶13. (SBU) Should the USG send a response team to Venezuela (Ref A), a subsequent or simultaneous mission to Lima would have similar benefits for our relationship with the GOP. Post has so far not suggested USG involvement to IPEN, nor spoken with other GOP agencies. The Ambassador is briefing the Prime Minister on May 9. Post requests press guidance, as the incident may surface in the Lima media.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) It remains a mystery how an engineer supposedly trained by both IPEN and Rapiscan could withdraw a radioactive capsule (even with some shielding) from a container with a clearly marked radioactive warning and put it in an unshielded location. It does not appear that Caddin was using the Victoreen radiation meter as would be expected when moving radioactive materials between a storage/shipping canister and the GARDS vehicle. We have no reason at this point to suspect anything but a negligent capsule removal, but Post will continue to vigorously investigate.

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